

Transit trips to work take twice as long as driving

Over 80 per cent of commuters drive, Statistics Canada finds

BY KELLY SINOSKI, VANCOUVER SUN AUGUST 25, 2011

The vast majority of Canadian commuters continue to drive to work rather than take transit despite a push to get people out of their cars and on to buses and trains, Statistics Canada reported Wednesday.

The reason? It's faster to drive.

The federal agency's 2010 General Social Survey, which sampled 6,650 respondents, found that the average Vancouver car commute was 25 minutes, 23 minutes shorter than the average transit commute of 48 minutes.

"Since the use of public transit involves walking, waiting and sometimes traffic congestion, it is not surprising that commuting times are generally longer for public transit users," the report said.

Congestion, sharing the road with cars, transfers, low-density transit hubs and out-of-sync schedules all contribute to the lag times for public transit.

Rapid-bus lanes and underground tunnels could speed up the transit commute, the report said, but on average car commutes are faster.

And, it seems, drivers are reluctant to test the system. About 82 per cent of Canadians travelled to work by car last year, while 12 per cent took transit and six per cent walked or cycled.

Of the 10.6 million workers who commuted by car nationally last year, about nine million have never used public transit to get to work, according to the survey. And of the 1.6 million who did, about 53 per cent said they found it inconvenient.

Then there's the stress that accompanies long commutes, especially if workers are stuck in daily traffic jams.

About 39 per cent of fulltime workers who took less than 15 minutes to get to the office said they felt pressed for time every day, the report said. Among those whose commuting time was 45 minutes or more, the percentage rose to 49 per cent.

Others blamed the long commute for messing with their life-work balance. "The feeling of being trapped in a routine and the impression that there is no time for fun also increased

with commuting time," the report said.

The average commute across Canada, including all modes of transportation, was about 26 minutes. The average commute in the Toronto metropolitan area is the longest in the country, at 33 minutes, followed by Montreal at 31 and Vancouver at 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, workers who walk or cycle to work have shorter trips, about 14 minutes on average.

TransLink spokesman Ken Hardie said the stats aren't surprising, noting that depending on where you go in Metro Vancouver, the transit story changes.

In downtown Vancouver, for instance, about 40 per cent of commuter trips are by transit; in Surrey, the number is less than five per cent.

But, he noted, while transit may take longer, it's generally more reliable, partly because of bus-only and queue-jumper lanes. "There's a time reliability," he said. "It may be that it's not faster than a car but it's as close to the same time each day as possible."

Hardie said TransLink's push for more transit services such as the Evergreen Line and rapid transit in Surrey are aimed at creating a better balance between cars and transit across the region so people who don't drive have other transport options.

In some cases, he said, people are willing to swap time for money: As it gets more expensive to drive a car, they are more willing to try transit. "Cars have a place on the network; [you] can't do without them," he said.

The StatsCan figures were released just days after TransLink announced that it expects to post a record year for transit ridership - surpassing last year when the city hosted the Winter Olympics.

There have already been 114.4 million transit trips in the first six months of the year, four per cent more than last year.

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